

The Visitor

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

Vol. LX

July 1974

No. 1

OVER THE SHOULDER

By Milo J. Peterson, Professor
Agricultural Education

Around the turn of the century agriculture was being taught in the public schools of Minnesota. Programs were supervised and guided by the County Superintendents of Schools and were largely centered in the elementary grades. To be sure, not all schools were involved in what might be called the forerunners of the community school philosophy. But it was a start, a beginning, of what was destined to become a major force for agricultural education in public education in the United States of America. Here was the seedbed of the Corn Clubs, Garden Clubs, Livestock Clubs, which were later to become the 4-H, FHA and FFA movements.

The role of the teacher of agriculture evolved slowly, but steadily. Agricultural education generally came to be recognized as a profession and the participants as a group of professionals with a mission. In Minnesota secondary schools began teaching agriculture in the early 1900's as a result of state legislation providing special aid for instruction in agriculture in ten schools. This was subsequently expanded until by 1914 Minnesota had a vigorous program of agricultural education in operation. Many other states never got around to doing much, if anything, of this nature.

Program Control

In this country we have cherished the notion of local control of public education. This was natural outgrowth of the early development of the American public school system. In fact, however, this notion was a myth. As far as vocational agriculture is concerned, local control was never a fact except for the decision as to whether the program should be initiated.

Vocational agriculture entered the public schools of the United States when it became obvious to some state governments, as in Minnesota, that local districts could not, or would not, meet the evident need. With the development of state support for agricultural education in Minnesota came also a set of rules and regulations sometimes described as "guidelines". To obtain the extra state support for the program certain re-

quirements had to be met. Special supervision and special teacher education programs were initiated through the University of Minnesota. By 1914 a department of agricultural education had been established in the College of Agriculture under the leadership of D. D. Mayne. In this same year, 1914 A.D., this professional journal, The Visitor, began publication. It now enjoys the enviable reputation of being the oldest professional publication in the field of agricultural education. Incidentally, The Visitor helped carry teaching suggestions and news of program development to the schools and is still published regularly. As far as can be determined, The Visitor is the oldest professional journal in vocational-technical education in the world.

Then in 1917 something happened. Every reader of this journal will know what the event was. Not, of course, the star of Bethlehem, but the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act. It took Minnesota several years to recover from this. At the time the State decided to accept the provisions of the Act, it was a new ball game with a new set of rules and, more important and somewhat significantly, a new author of the rule book — the federal government. Now it was the Federal Board for Vocational Education, rather than the State Department of Education, that called the tune.

This case history traces clearly the transfer of program control from local to state to federal government levels. Financial support for vocational agriculture did not originate in Washington. However, it is true that in many, if not most states, vocational education as an integral component of the public school system had its origin with the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act. In many respects this constitutes an indictment of local and state leadership.

The Act affected program control in many ways. First, it directly involved State Departments of Education by requiring State Boards for Vocational Education to administer the Act within the States. Second, it initiated teacher education programs in the colleges and universities. Third, it prompted the appointment of state supervisors as representatives of the State Boards. Fourth, it precipitated state plans that were structured to meet federal requirements by spelling out standards to be met in order to qualify for federal funds. Fifth, it stimulated the provision of state and local appropria-

tions on a matching basis with federal dollars. As a general rule, local and state funds substantially overmatched federal money. Sixth, the Act generated a hue and cry among general education ranks for more federal aid. This has now come to pass.

This observation is incidental to the thrust of this essay, but it has been amusing to observe state departments of education and local school districts running in all directions to qualify for federal funds under this or that Title of this or that Act in the wake of recent federal legislation. And this after years of NEA propaganda that federal aid need not mean federal control! The exposure of this myth must have the same effect on those naive enough to believe it, as the unveiling of Santa Claus has on the very young.

Recent legislation has altered the rules of the game, but basically the effect has been to reconstruct the rubrics of categorical aid rather than to eliminate the original organic Act which was based on clear-cut categorical aid based on programmatic objectives rather than sociological concepts. Plainly we must all accept the fact that just as state aid to local districts brought more direct state control and regulation, so does federal aid entail observance of conditions prescribed by the Congress and administered by a national bureaucracy.

Certainly this is proper and to be commended. Any unit of government should in no way give away taxpayers money without conditions and guidelines. To do otherwise would be irresponsible. At the same time this does not imply agreement with the regulations handed down from time to time, but the principle is sound and should be supported. The idea of dispensing taxpayers money without restriction opens the door to the very worst kind of boondoggling.

The issue, as far as agricultural education

is concerned, is how to use available funds for the advancement of educational opportunity in agriculture. Additionally we have the further responsibility of working for adjustments relative to conditions which work to the disadvantage of the man on the land. In the most simple terms, agricultural education leaders must accept it or do something about it. If the decision is to take it, as we must, then the challenge is to **shape** control patterns rather than to **submit** to them. **Control is where the money is.** Control of money governs program development. He who pays the fiddler calls the tune.

Program Development

No reader of *The Visitor* needs to be reminded that changes have taken place in vocational agriculture. All fields of service in vocational education have been given broader responsibility under recent legislation. In the welter of pilot programs, innovative experiments, field demonstrations, career education, across-the-board homogenization, there seems to be a blind acceptance that any change is progress. A few facts and issues stand out in bold relief. Vocational agriculture has done, is doing, and will hopefully continue to do a creditable job of preparing people for entry into, and advancement in agriculture. Likewise the training and retraining of adults constitutes a high-priority item. This is, however, an aspect of vocational agriculture that is in danger of being undernourished.

Who is training the entrepreneurs? What programs are providing education and experience in proprietary management? Where can students gain instruction and experience in the art and science of combining land, labor, raw materials and capital for the purpose of making a profit? This must ever be a hallmark of vocational agriculture.

Vocational agriculture and all vocational education must do more than tailor a product to meet the standards of employers. Into the learning experiences must be woven those activities that will encourage and develop the budding proprietor, owner, manager, the future employer, and capitalist. Vocational agriculture has met this obligation in part. Entrepreneurial training is the essence of sound supervised occupational experience and is a direct outgrowth of supervised farming programs.

Program development increasingly requires more effective utilization of resources

Vol. LX THE VISITOR No. 1

Published quarterly during the calendar year in January, April, July and October by the
Division of Agricultural Education,
University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minn. 55101

Second class postage paid at St. Paul, Minn.

THE STAFF

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
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R. PAUL MARVIN, *Editor*

and cooperation with other fields of service. A recent example of a major adjustment in program development may be observed in home economics. Over the years home economics has provided this nation with an almost universal home-making education program. It has provided most, if not all, of the education in nutrition, child care, family life, and homemaking skills that the vast majority of the brides of America bring to their homes. This basic contribution must be preserved, expanded and strengthened. But home economics has been given additional responsibility as have all other fields of service. It must provide vocational education in the wage-earning and proprietary occupations. Food service occupations, specialized institutional occupations such as nursing-home management, child care, and proxy parent training to assist working mothers illustrate the range and variety of the task.

At issue is not whether vocational agriculture, home economics or other fields of service should choose either broad occupational and entrepreneurial training or wage-earning education. Both must be accomplished. The issue is one of securing additional resources, especially teachers, and combining present resources to insure the development of one without prejudice to the other. The opportunities for educational leadership are unlimited in vocational education, but carry the prerequisites of sound philosophy, tough intellect and absolute dedication.

In an effort to make most effective use of available resources in the face of increasing demands has come the move to combine programs and develop multi-purpose programs that utilize two or more specialized areas. This has met with some success, but there is a danger involved. In some state education departments, for example, the fields of service are no longer specifically identified. There are no longer state supervisors for agriculture, home economics, distributive, industrial, and business education. These have been supplanted or "recategorized" into a group of consultants in vocational education. This gives ground for the suspicion that each will be assumed to serve all fields of service with equal effectiveness or lack thereof. This kind of integration may well result in death by homogenization unless the issue is resolved by its own absurdity.

The educational needs of modern agricultural production, marketing, processing, distribution and servicing are not met by lumping agriculture together with equally

specialized fields. Trade and industrial education does not become less complex or less specialized by calling it something else. Each field of service requires a particular expertise and vocational education programs are useful only when they utilize specialists in each field of service. This must be the case at all levels of teacher education, state supervision and instruction.

Financial Support

Program development must be nourished by dollars. Federal legislation mandates vocational education for all people in all communities. There aren't that many dollars, therefore, the financial nourishment must be rationed. Rationing involves priorities, in this case educational priorities. Such priorities might well be established on the basis of immediate need and the relative benefit-cost ratio.

The basics of an educational program are teaching and research. These are the red and white corpuscles of the blood stream, but the carrier is dollars. Over the years local support has far surpassed federal inputs of money for vocational agriculture. However, recent increases in federal monies have shifted the ratio. At present local funds amount to about 40 percent of the total with state and federal funds making up the balance. There seems to be an idea that federal money is somebody else's money. It follows that the more federal money channelled into a particular program or project, the less it will cost the local and state taxpayers. This rationale has been used to stimulate local and state support of many activities, including vocational agriculture.

There is a grain of truth in this rationale. Federal money is derived from the taxpayers of 50 states, and if one state or local school district secures federal money it is, in effect, being subsidized by the other 49 states. However, it is precisely the expertise of the federal government in separating people from their money in the first place that enables it to be the generous donor in the second place.

On the basis of evidence at hand, more and more massive federal spending can be expected for vocational-technical education, including education in agriculture. As this takes place, there will be a corresponding increase in the need for leadership to cope with program development and provide the direction for improving education opportunity in agriculture. To this challenge agricultural education must address itself.

TEACHER SHORTAGE

By Milo J. Peterson

In 1934 graduates in agricultural education were very aggressive in seeking teaching positions. It was not uncommon for two, three or four men looking toward graduation to get into an automobile and visit one school after another seeking employment. It was a buyers market. One incident will serve to illustrate the lengths to which a prospective "ag man" was willing to go in order to get his name on a contract. The young man, who shall go unnamed, had completed his interview with a superintendent and was informed that his qualifications were acceptable except for the fact that he was single. Further questioning revealed that he could have the job if he were married. The young man asked if he might use the telephone, flipped through his little black book and phoned his favorite young lady. He informed her he had a job if she would marry him before July 1. She accepted the long distance proposal, and the contract was duly signed.

By 1946 the situation had changed markedly. It was now a sellers market. Schools were seeking teachers of agriculture with a zeal heretofore unknown. As the program grew and expanded this trend continued and, indeed, continues to date. There have always been more employment opportunities than could be filled by the available supply of qualified graduates. A brief look at the record for the past five years will illustrate the situation.

| Year | Graduates | Employment Opportunities |
|------|-----------|---|
| 1970 | 38 | 71 |
| 1971 | 31 | 85 |
| 1972 | 25 | 83 |
| 1973 | 32 | 114 |
| 1974 | 33 | Two men unsigned, 46 vacancies remain. |

There are several reasons for the growth of the program of vocational agriculture. It has proved to be a significant factor in rural

community development. The fact that adult education has been given an equal priority with the secondary level program has provided public schools the opportunity to extend their influence throughout the community they are designed to serve. With the advent of the farm business management emphasis in 1952 the program of adult education has shown a marked growth. An increasing awareness and responsiveness to total community needs on the part of school administrators has also been a factor in the growth of the program. The contributions of the FFA in areas of community service, citizenship and leadership development surely must be recognized. In this instance credit must be given to W. J. Kortsmaki for his life-long devotion to the cause of vocational agriculture through the FFA. But the basic reason for the growth of the program has been the performance of dedicated teachers of agriculture in the community schools of Minnesota.

Why is there a shortage of qualified teachers of agriculture, not only in Minnesota, but nation-wide? Certainly this writer does not have the answer. The great majority of graduates enter the teaching profession. A few continue graduate study in other fields such as plant pathology and agricultural economics. A few choose to serve agriculture through the agricultural extension service. Some are employed by industry. Most of the graduates who do not enter teaching go into the business of farming. Nevertheless, the question remains: Why are there not more graduates in agricultural education when opportunities for employment or self-employment are so plentiful?

At the University of Minnesota there are 125 undergraduates majoring in agricultural education. There should be at least twice that number to meet the demand. A recent study conducted by Dr. Edgar Persons and his associates shows that from 1969-1970 to 1973-1974 there has been about a 10 percent annual rate of teachers of agriculture leaving the profession. To replace those who leave the profession for reasons of retirement or otherwise and to provide an increasing supply of qualified teachers of agriculture to meet the ever growing demand is a problem of opportunity for all those concerned with the future of the wide and wonderful world of modern agriculture.